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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HALIFAX 0108

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

DEPT FOR WHA/CAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [CVIS](#) [PBTS](#) [EWWT](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: ALIEN SMUGGLING AT HALIFAX PORT

1. SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The port of Halifax is facing a growing problem of stowaways, primarily of Romanian nationality, who arrive here hidden in shipping containers on board commercial freight vessels originating at southern European ports. Certain smuggling rings, probably linked to organized crime, appear to be exploiting marine shipping to Halifax as their preferred means of getting illegal migrants into North America. It is unclear how many of these container stowaways are seeking to enter the United States as their final destination. (END SUMMARY)

3. (SBU) Over the past several years, Canadian authorities in Halifax have discovered increasing numbers of intending immigrants arriving as stowaways aboard commercial container ships bound from southern European ports. Contacts in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and in Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) have told Congen that, in 2000, they arrested at least 25 persons attempting to enter the country in this manner. By 2002, the number had risen to 42. Although no stowaways have yet been intercepted in Halifax in 2003, it is too early in the year to identify a trend because most alien smuggling of this type occurs during the warmer months of the year. Local officials also acknowledge that it is impossible to know how many stowaways arrive in Halifax this way without being detected.

4. (SBU) Marine container stowaways arriving in Halifax are predominantly Romanian (at least 90 percent), although a small number of Moldavians, Bulgarians, and other Eastern Europeans have also taken this route. According to CIC contacts, they tend to be males between the ages of 18 and 45. Most had been living and working illegally for some time in other European countries (particularly Italy and Spain), usually in construction or as unskilled laborers, prior to embarking. About 90 percent claim to have been assisted by a smuggler, who brings them into the cargo terminal and places them in a container prior to loading. The intending immigrants are responsible for bringing their own food, water, toilet facilities, and cutting tools. Fees for this service generally range from 500 to 1,500 Euros. CIC and RCMP officials strongly suspect that these smugglers have ties to organized crime, but they have made no progress in identifying which criminal organizations are involved.

5. (SBU) Smugglers typically place the intending immigrants in 40-foot shipping containers loaded with heavy goods such as ceramic tile, paper, wine, or cognac. These containers have sufficient empty space inside to accommodate the passengers. The smugglers instruct their customers to cut themselves out of their containers after about two days at sea, once the vessel is far enough out to guarantee that the ship's captain will not turn around to put the stowaways ashore at the port of origin. Halifax officials are convinced that these smuggling rings have accomplices among the stevedores responsible for loading vessels, since the containers with stowaways invariably are placed along the outside of a stack, allowing the occupants an easy exit from the container.

6. (SBU) In past years, according to Halifax officials, most container stowaways had originated from the Italian ports of Livorno and Genova. As recently as late 2001, the RCMP had confided to Congen that Italian authorities seemed to show little enthusiasm for aggressively combating this type of outgoing alien smuggling from their ports. RCMP and CIC contacts, however, now indicate that interest in port security measures and cooperation in combating alien smuggling via shipping containers has increased markedly among their Italian contacts in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The RCMP believes that port security measures adopted principally to combat terrorism are beginning to have a beneficial trickle-down effect on attempts to curb this type of illegal immigration.

7. (SBU) As Italian ports are becoming less accessible, our contacts say, alien smugglers are shifting their efforts to Spain, transforming Barcelona into the preferred port of departure for container ship stowaways. Officials of the RCMP's Immigration and Passport Section returned last week from a visit to Barcelona to improve cooperation and coordination with their port security counterparts there. These officials told conoff

that the Spanish were cooperative and appear to be making major strides in tightening security at the port. They reported that new security measures in the port of Barcelona include a network of 65 cameras tied to a central monitoring facility, improved access IDQs for port workers, the introduction of electronic cargo manifests, gamma-ray scanning devices, and improved container seals. RCMP contacts also report the active support of the stevedoreQs union, such as by making clear to its membership that any complicity in alien smuggling would result in the loss of union membership.

18. (SBU) Our contacts are cautiously optimistic that cooperation with Italian and Spanish authorities will reverse the trend in alien smuggling to Halifax via marine containers. The RCMP, however, fears that the criminal organizations that involved in trafficking in illegal immigrants might then simply shift their efforts to other European ports with easier access. They say that Lisbon could become a venue for such activity because port security there has not improved as quickly or as markedly as in Italy and Spain.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: It is unclear how many of these container stowaways are seeking to enter the United States as their final destination. Some of the ships carrying these intending immigrants were bound for U.S. ports after leaving Halifax. We will endeavor to get our local police and immigration contacts to focus on this question in their future investigations into this alien smuggling problem.

KASHKETT